

TWO NEW SPECIES OF STRIPED BLINDSNAKES

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Ramphotyphlops silvia sp.nov. occurs in sand in rainforest mostly within the Great Sandy Region, SEQ. It is striped to black-and-white with 20 midbody scale rows and differs from *R. minimus* (midbody scale rows 16) and *R. chamodracaena* sp.nov (18). *R. broomi* also has 20 midbody scale rows, but has a nasal cleft that distinguishes it from *R. silvia* sp.nov. *R. chamodracaena* sp.nov. is a striped blindsnake found in the west and far north of Cape York Peninsula. Midbody scale count separates it from other striped species. □ *Reptilia, Serpentes, Typhlopidae, Ramphotyphlops, new species, blindsnake, Queensland, Australia.*

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Blindsnakes are usually dull, virtually patternless snakes. However, some species are strongly marked, sometimes striped, e.g. *Ramphotyphlops minimus* (Kinghorn, 1929) and *R. broomi* (Boulenger, 1898). To these we add *R. silvia* sp.nov. and *R. chamodracaena* sp.nov. Striped blindsnakes are found mainly in woodlands of northern Australia. The latter new species is from northern woodlands. *R. silvia* sp.nov., however, inhabits rainforests on sand, southeastern Queensland. Measurements (mm) and scale counts here follow Storr (1981). Specimens prefixed by 'J' and 'R' are housed in the Queensland and Australian Museums respectively. Regions for Queensland follow Ingram & Raven (1991).

Ramphotyphlops silvia sp.nov. (Figs 1, 2)

MATERIAL EXAMINED

HOLOTYPE: J27387 Seary's Scrub, Cooloola NP (25°58'S, 153°07'E), SEQ. Collected by J. Covacevich & P. Filewood, 3-6 February, 1976.

PARATYPES: J31579 Fraser Is., NP HQ; J31576-7 Fraser Is. NP, HQ on 'A' rd; J35872 Tuan SF, Firetower 6; J27386 Seary's Scrub, Cooloola NP; J43785 Cooloola NP; J23620 Cooloola, on Freshwater rd, 5km from junction; J46128 Pomona, 25km N, on rd to Rainbow Beach; J8521 Nambour. All localities in SEQ.

DIAGNOSIS

A small (maximum total length 175), striped or black-and-white *Ramphotyphlops* with 20 midbody scale rows. The nasal cleft extends up from the nostril, to about the level of the eye and nearly divides the nasal (Fig. 1).

DESCRIPTION

Total length: 72-175 (N 10, mean 143.6). Length of tail (% of total length): 2-5 (N 10, mean 3.6). Rostral (from above) elliptic, a little longer than wide, about half as wide as head and extending back to just in front of, or just between, the level of the eyes. Nasals narrowly separated behind rostral. Frontal smaller than prefrontal. Snout rounded in profile. Nostrils inferior, closer to rostral than preocular. Nasal cleft proceeding from second labial (close to the juncture of the 1st and 2nd labial) and extending vertically from nostril to about the level of eye, nearly dividing the nasal. Midbody scale rows 20 (N 10). Ventrals 272-320 (N 9, mean 293.9). Subcaudals 14-21 (N 9, mean 17.6). Dorsal and lateral surfaces with 11 thick, purplish brown stripes along body on a creamy yellow background. Mostly however, the stripes merge and the dorsal and lateral surfaces appear evenly purplish black. Ventral surface cream to creamy yellow — one specimen has two black bands across the throat. The ventral colour contrasts strongly with the lateral colour (Fig. 2).

DISTRIBUTION

Coastal rainforest on Quaternary sands, from Fraser Is. to Noosa NP, SEQ (S. Wilson, pers. comm.), except for an old specimen from Nambour, SEQ.

ETYMOLOGY

There are two allusions. Rhea Silvia was the mother of Romulus and Remus, legendary founders of Rome. Hannah Sylvia Ingram is the mother of one of us.

REMARKS

R. silvia appears to be endemic to the Quaternary sands of coastal SE Queensland and most of its distribution falls within the Great Sandy Region. For discussions of these faunas see Kikkawa et al. (1979) and Dwyer et al. (1979).

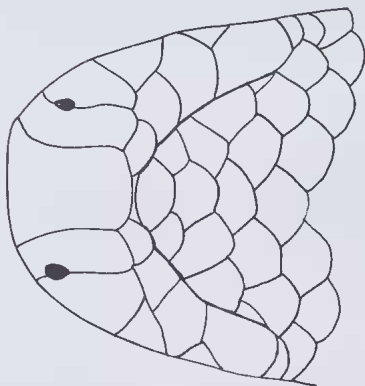
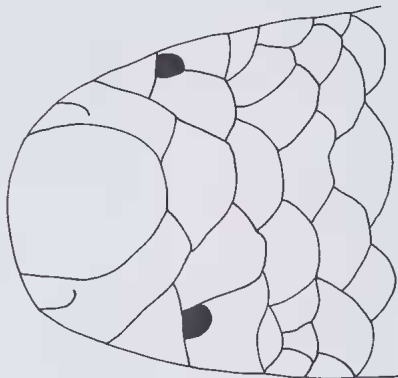
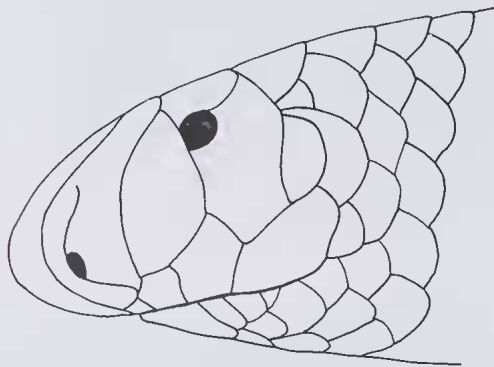


FIG. 1. *Ramphotyphlops silvia* sp. nov. (paratype J23620). Above: dorsal view of head. Centre: lateral view of head. Below: ventral view of head.

***Ramphotyphlops chamodracaena* sp. nov.**
(Fig. 3)

1992 *Ramphotyphlops* sp. Cameron & Cogger, p.60, pl.25.

MATERIAL EXAMINED

HOLOTYPE: J40233 N Camp 'Beagle', ca.40km N Aurukun (13°05'S, 141°59'E), Cape York Peninsula. Collected by G. Ingram & P. Webber, 18 March, 1982.

PARATYPES: J31963 Weipa, Andoom Mine; J41550 Weipa; R91631 Rocky Pt, Weipa; R93164 Weipa; J28082 Lockhart R. Settlement; J39673 N Camp 'Beagle', 15km from camp on rd to Watson R.; J51980 Inkerman Stn. All localities are on Cape York Peninsula.

DIAGNOSIS

A small (maximum total length 210), striped *Ramphotyphlops* with 18 midbody scale rows. The nasal cleft extends diagonally up from nostril to terminate about halfway between nostril and rostral (Fig. 3).

DESCRIPTION

Total length: 114-210 (N 8, mean 164.3). Length of tail (% of total length): 1-3 (N 8, mean 1.8). Rostral (from above) elliptic, a little longer than wide, about half as wide as head and extending back to just in front of, or just between, the level of the eyes. Nasals narrowly separated behind rostral. Frontal smaller than prefrontal. Snout rounded in profile. Nostrils inferior, closer to rostral than preocular. Nasal cleft proceeding from second labial and extending diagonally up from nostril to terminate shortly about halfway between nostril and rostral. Midbody scale rows 18 (N 8). Ventrals 464-523 (N 7, mean 486.1). Subcaudals 14-16 (N 8, mean 15.1). Dorsal, lateral and ventral surfaces usually totally striped (18 stripes along body, but one specimen has 16). Stripes are dark to light brown on a yellowish cream to off-white background. Tail black and, in some specimens, the head is black. For a colour photograph, see Cameron & Cogger (1992, pl.25).

DISTRIBUTION

Western Cape York Peninsula from Weipa south to Inkerman Station. Also recorded from Lockhart R. Settlement on the east coast. Inhabits woodland, but Cameron & Cogger (1992) also note that its occurrence on lawns after watering.

ETYMOLOGY

'Chamodracaena' (earth snake) was one of the 12½ names of the female demon Gello (Stoneman, 1991).



FIG. 2. *Ramphotyphlops silvia* sp. nov. Pile Valley, Fraser Is., August, 1993 (S. Wilson).

REMARKS

Most of the publications on Australian blindsnakes have followed Waite (1918). His paper was an important beginning, but his 'species' are sometimes not easily recognised. It is also difficult to recheck his work, because no registration numbers are given for his specimens and there are no data on where they are housed.

The identity of *R. broomi* (Boulenger, 1898) is a case in point. Waite examined five specimens and referred them to Boulenger's taxon. These came from Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia. However, Storr (1981) made no mention of *broomi*, or any other striped species, in his revision of the Western Australian blindsnakes. As well, we cannot be confident that we have examined any specimens of Waite's *broomi*. Thus we are unsure of his concept of the taxon.

Even so, in northeastern Queensland, there is a small blindsnake known only from the area between the western edge of the Atherton Tableland and Cooktown. It matches Boulenger's description ('20 scales round the body. Pale buff above, with 11 brown streaks following the series of scales, white beneath') and is found near the type locality of *R. broomi*, Muldiva, NEQ. However,

we cannot be completely sure of the identity until the holotype of *Typhlops broomi* in the Natural History Museum, London, can be examined. For this paper, we have assumed that this taxon is *R. broomi*. If it is, considering the localities Waite gave, we are confident that none of his specimens were *broomi*, because that species appears to be restricted to the dry belt along the western edge of the Wet Tropics. The confusion with the identity of *R. broomi* is evident in Wilson & Knowles (1988). Their '*R. broomi*' (pl.827) is not *R. broomi* as we understand it. However, their photograph of *Ramphotyphlops* sp. (pl.847) appears to be true *R. broomi*. This is J47254 from Cooktown — S. Wilson, pers. comm.

R. chamodracaena is most similar to *R. broomi* and *R. minimus*. However, besides the smaller number of midbody scale rows (18 vs 20), *R. chamodracaena* is usually striped all round the body while *R. broomi* is not striped ventrally (number of stripes 16-18 vs 11-15). Cameron & Cogger (1992) have discussed the similarities and differences between *R. chamodracaena* (as *Ramphotyphlops* sp.) and *R. minimus*, a species with 16 midbody scale rows.

OTHER MATERIAL EXAMINED

R. broomi: J46849 Cooktown, James Cook Museum Building; J47254 Cooktown; J20315 Mt Molloy; J2953-4, 47503 Atherton Tbls, Stannary Hills, nr Herberton; J53305 Mt Rosey, 15 mile Ck camp; R128220 Mandalee, Innot Hot

Springs. All localities in Cape York Peninsula and NEQ. *R. minimus*: R9692 Groote Eylandt, NT (holotype); R9693, R61025-6 (paratypes) same data as holotype.

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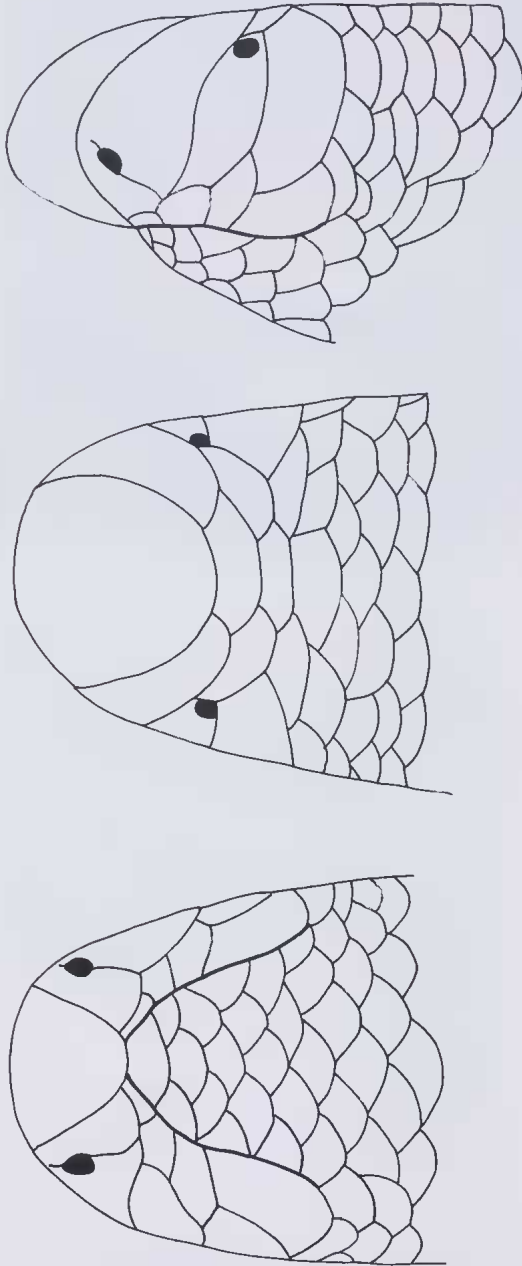


FIG. 3. *Ramphotyphlops chamodracaena* sp.nov. (paratype J39673). Above: dorsal view of head. Centre: lateral view of head. Below: ventral view of head.